

The Binnacle

Charting Your Own Course



Welcome to **The Binnacle**.
We are a lifestyle and resource newsletter where disability is centered and celebrated as diversity.

Here the challenges that come with living fully as a person with a disability are embraced with gusto, joy, and humor.
Embark with us!



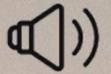
[Stories](#)

[Tips & Hacks](#)

[Resources](#)



The Binnacle is the case in which the ship's compass is kept. It allowed mariners to determine their direction even if clouds obscured their usual astronomical cues such as the North Star.



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Notes from the Publisher

Aldea LaParr



Welcome to our fall edition. This is a very special time of year for me. I love the idea of slowing down and hibernating for the winter. But there is a downfall. Especially if you're a person living with a disability and are unable to connect with others. This issue will talk about connecting with others and some tools to stay connected to others.

Over the years, I've made so many wonderful connections through this publication. I have learned so much about the IDD world that I had never known myself.

Storytelling is the best way to stay connected. When somebody reads your story, you make a connection with somebody without even knowing it.

We want others to feel comfortable to contact us and let us know what topics or activities that you would like us to cover. We also want anyone who wants to share their story to contact us!

[Contact Us Here](#)



The Days Are Shorter, but We Can Keep the Sunshine Bright Within Us

Michael McGilton

This is the time of the year when each day that goes by there is a little less daylight. It is also the time of the year when some people are getting ready for holiday parties, spending time with friends, vacation, and many other fun activities. But did you know that at this time of the year it is very important to think about how you will take care of yourself? For some people, having less daylight can cause them to feel sad or down. For other people, the hustle and bustle of this time of the year can be very overwhelming. It is important to plan for how you will care for yourself during the holiday season and the rest of the winter months. I hope that I can offer some meaningful tips.

During the winter months, it can be more difficult to get out and do some of the things that you enjoy because of the cold, snow, and ice depending on where you live. This might sound like a downer, but this time of the year can offer different opportunities. Many of us can do indoor activities that we have been putting off for a long time. This is the time of the year that we have a chance to do some of those things. Some people like to catch up on shows they have recorded throughout the year, some might like to write letters to friends, and others might enjoy reading or listening to books. If you know that you will be indoors for a few days or more, it can be helpful to plan for how you will spend each day. This can help with staying positive since you will have something to look forward to each day.

Being with friends and family at this time of the year can be very positive for many people. Sometimes people get to see friends and family to celebrate traditions. Spending with others that we have not seen in a while can lift your spirits and create feelings of joy. I like to say that each year that we spend with others allows us to add to our memory book. Our memory book whether it cards or pictures, we can work on putting together after the holidays to help us keep those positive feelings going.

For some of us, the holidays can seem difficult and stressful especially if you are alone. But, even if you are alone or only with one other person, the holidays can still be a very special time of the year. Holidays could be a in which you can celebrate you and your life! It can be a day in which you can eat some of favorite foods no matter what that are. It can also be a day that you can enjoy all of your indoor activities. If you know that you will be alone or spending with only one or a few other people, making a plan of how you will spend the day can help to make it one of the most special days for you all year long.

To help keep the sunshine bright within all year all, make each day filled with meaning and remember that it is your day!





The bright side of social media



Everything going on involving social media, I just want to point out what I see is the bright side of social media.

Connecting with friends is not only healthy, but it can be life changing. In 2010, when my husband passed away, I was living in upstate NY isolated from most extended family and close friends from college. I posted on my Facebook page about Gary to inform those who may be interested in knowing.

I started to receive messages from people I hadn't seen in years. All of a sudden I did not feel isolated. I felt like I was a part of a community. We all need community and connections, no matter what that looks like.

The cool thing is it's been fifteen years, and just this week, I had the opportunity to visit two long-time friends we're in my area just for the day!

Connecting With Others During The Holidays

Philip Woodward



How do you connect with other people during the holiday season, especially people whom you might not be able to see in person? There are "many times, many ways" to stay connected to people "ages one to 92." Read some ideas below:

Learn how to sign Christmas carols in American Sign Language (ASL)! A fun way to learn sign language is to learn how to sign Christmas carols! In college at William & Mary, members of the William & Mary Sign Language Club and I learned how to sign songs to perform at an elementary school and to sign at the W&M Choir's holiday concert. These included "Up on the Housetop," "Joy to the World," "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," and "Silent Night." When you go Carolina, you never know if you'll end up ringing the doorbell of a Deaf person who will appreciate your new talent!

Play interactive games! Office and Christmas party games include the White Elephant gift exchange, Musical Chairs, match your co-worker to their favorite Christmas movie, and the unwrap games where you attempt to unwrap a package or a ball of saran wrap while wearing mittens or gloves. They are a great way to bond with your co-workers!

Play Facebook games! A friend of mine from college sells children's books, and one year in December she spent a lot of time interacting with her customers on Facebook through fun games! One game was a finish the sentence or story game where she gave us a sentence from a Christmas poem such as "'Twas the Night Begore Christmas" and asked each if us to add a line in the Comments. It turned out to be funny because different people would add a sentence simultaneously, thereby creating some run-on sentences or non-sensical phrases, making the responses humorous and giving all of us a reason to laugh!

Create #CardArt and Crafts: In 2020, the Topps trading card company hired 20 artists to create their own take on famous rookie baseball cards and then hired even more artists to do the same with all of their baseball card designs in 2021. These were called Topps Project 2020 and Topps Project70. I got the idea and created my own Phil's Holiday #CardArt Project 2021 to create some Christmas-themed sports cards for my friends who collect. I would mail them by surprise and enjoyed awaiting their responses to receiving mail and their thank yous!

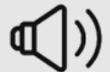
Spread the Holiday Cheer Far and Near! Remember that some people, including people with disabilities, don't have family nearby. Make an effort to include these people and do something to brighten their day. Last year I told a friend with I/DD that I was attending a conference in Winston-Salem in December, and she asked me to get her as many promotional items as possible such as cool pens, stress balls, stickers, gadgets, and other items. I sent her a large box filled with these items, and she called them "neato!" I enjoy being Santa Phil annually!



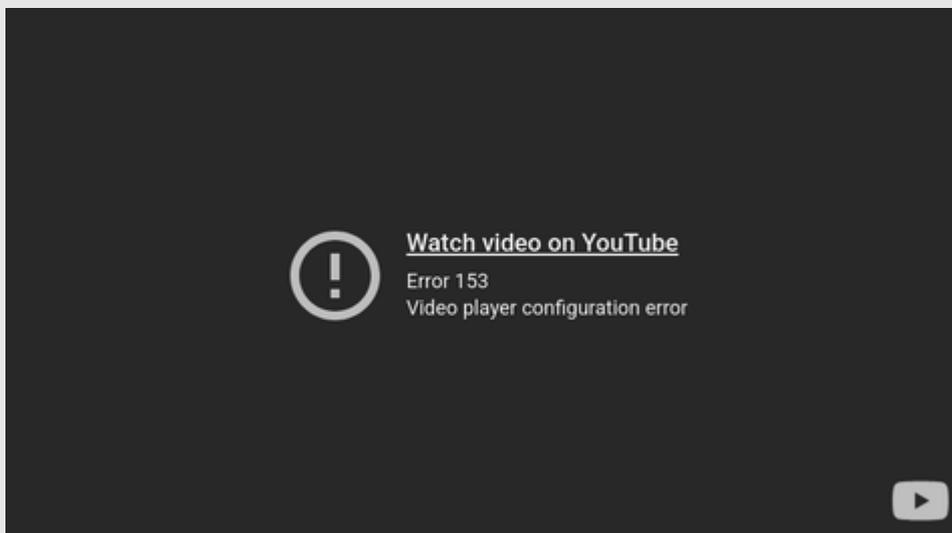


The wonders of Technology

Aldea LaParr



Ever since I was introduced to the computer. I am always on the lookout for a new software program that can help me. Just recently, I found this program that allows me to speak and it will record in text form. The great thing about this software is once installed on my computer, I can use it in all my applications. Not only do I use it when creating documents, I use it with my Gmail, Facebook Messenger and Canva without having to find a compatible Speech-to-Text for each program!



[Click here if video does not start automatically.](#)



My continuing typing with Voiceitt



Michael Orzel

Years ago, when I was struggling to get my thoughts to computer format, I typed very slow. The reason why I type so slow is because I used my nose as my pecking device to type. It was not bad, but it was slow and tedious since I had to bend my neck to have my nose type each letter. But as the years went on I had trouble with my neck and it caused pain, so much so that I was out of work for three months. I now think that it was because I was typing with my nose exclusively.

About ten to fifteen years ago (if memory serves) I read about a company in Israel that was trying to create a program that would translate "unusual speech " into the written word and at that time it was searching for only funding. It was an attempt at that time to fund this idea, so I put it away in my memory and then a couple years later my supervisor at work read about it and told me about it.

I contacted Voiceitt and people from Connecticut and the companies home country of Israel, came over to our house and set me up. In the first edition of the Binnacle a video of my wife and myself was included showing how I could control our lights and our television by voice, we were very emotional



Click picture to view video

Now Voiceitt is an integral part of my life because I type with it constantly with only a few mistakes. It allowed me to have more complete thoughts on paper without fumbling around trying to type with my nose. It also releases the strain on my neck so that I don't have to worry about losing work (as I did when I just used my nose earlier on).

I would tell anyone that has trouble with communication with the computer to look up this company. After training Voiceitt to recognize your voice (only about 50 phrases) you will be on your way to an easier way to communicate, with everyone.

An added feature is that with my Apple phone if a person is having trouble understanding me, I could have Voiceitt translate my voice and speak out loud. I have never used it yet but this is an option.

If you want to look into this then go to www.Voiceitt.com. You will be glad you did.

Our Gentle Giant



by Aldea LaParr

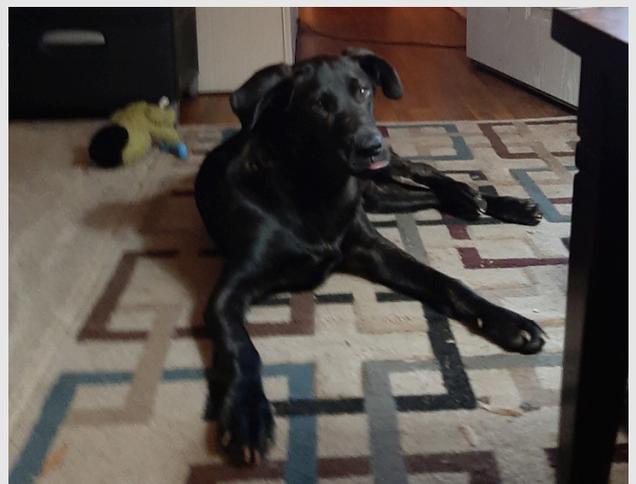


Over the summer my son really wanted to find a dog to call his own. My son is 28 and lives with me. At first, I was hesitant. But I knew it would help him with his mental challenges to have a companion.

He looked on the internet at the local shelter's website. He has his heart set on this certain dog, but when he got there, the dog had already been adopted. He decided to walk down the hall and check out some of the dogs. When this little Belgian Malinois German shepherd mix caught his eye, it was love at first sight!

We have been three months in a row and Alphonse is no longer a small dog. He is no longer just my son's dog. He is my gentle giant. He has not only learned of Scott's emotional needs he has learned my physical needs. I am amazed by his ability to adapt and perceive situations. He came to us as a puppy I was taken back by all the energy. I did have my doubts about this dog. Our house is very small, and I wasn't sure he would be able to be trained. But I was wrong!

I call him my Gentle Giant because he is now so big! He has actually brought so much stability into our lives. Because of the need to be on schedule with the puppy, we are all on a schedule now. Alphonse even goes to work with Scott. They have a kennel all for him with all the amenities. Whenever Scott needs a break or Alphonse needs a break, it's break time! All the employees love him.



A Christmas Essay

c) 2025 Wendy P. Orzel



This is a Christmas poem to show people that they can dream they can dream big they can dream small, because does it matter about the size of the Christmas gift at all?

Cherish with what you have with family and friends this holiday season even to those who might need a little gifted hand to even those overseas.

This gift can be so beautiful you may not always see it but it's the magic of this Christmas gift could that be anywhere

Should it matter how big or small the gift is?

Whether it's a small or large gift could be for one and all. so as you sit around singing a Christmas tune or two, decorating the Christmas tree there's this wonderful gift we all have indeed.

So gather all your friends this holiday season, merry Christmas and happy holidays to all.

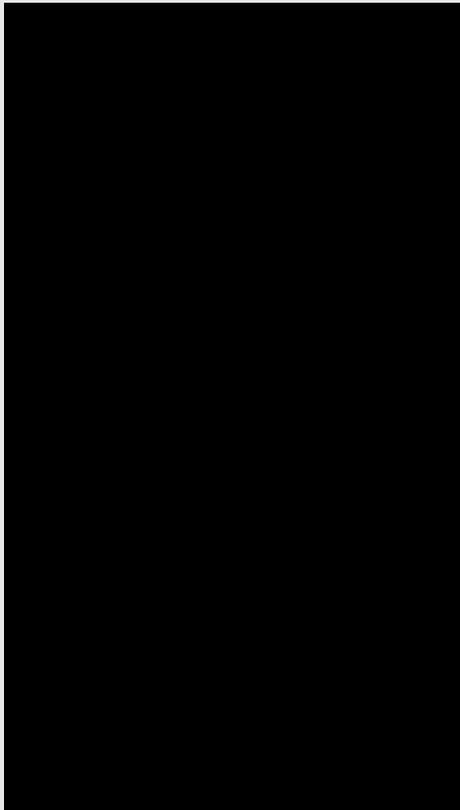
Tips & Hacks



This egg cooker is a lifesaver for me. I do not even have to touch the hot water and it turns off by itself.



These gloves protect from accidental cuts. Having both hands protected is great.



This is a great storage hack, but I do suggest sturdy plastic baskets or bins.



[Click here if video does not start automatically.](#)



Ability Leadership Program- North Carolina (ALP-NC)

Aldea LaParr



“At ALP-NC, our mission is to empower individuals from diverse backgrounds to become effective leader advocates. We believe that by sharing our stories, working together, and learning from each other, we can create a more just and inclusive world.”

I really wanted to introduce this program because I just completed it and it changed so many things for me. While being a self-advocate, I never had the opportunity to sit and be trained with other self-advocates. Listening to everyone's story really opened my eyes. It's one thing to develop advocacy skills on your own, but being in a group helped me understand that Self Advocacy can lead to also changing the lives of others.

Over Zoom, I met so many awesome self advocates from all over North Carolina and got to hear their stories as well. So many different stories that all seemed to overlap which made this training so eye opening to me.



By the end of our meetings, we each presented a 3-minute presentation of our own story. To be used for purposes of advocacy either for ourselves or for a group of people. I did mine by reading the following.

Having to decide whether or not to get medical assistance when needed is not always an easy decision for me. Sometimes I do not seek assistance because I do not know how I am going to pay the bill. This can be very stressful and leads to not seeing a medical professional when needed. As an individual living independently with a disability, I lack necessary medical insurance to cover medical bills.

Because my Social Security Disability benefit is higher than the income guidelines for Medicaid, I am not eligible. I actually pay my premiums for Medicare which I qualify for due to receiving SSDI, but Medicare does not cover all my medical expenses.

As I age, balance and mobility have become an issue. I seem to be falling more often and I do not bounce back up like I used to. This summer was very stressful because I ended up fracturing my hand and required therapy to rehab my hand.

When it happened, my first thought was that my finger just needed to be put back in place. How can I fix this without going to urgent care? I actually drove to where my adult son was staying thinking maybe he can help me put my finger back in place. He took one look and said we were going to urgent care. Then the panic set in. Not because of my injury, but because I knew the medical bill would be huge.

I would like to see the Medicaid system take a deeper look into an individual's main source of income when applying. If they are already receiving SS due to a disability, it usually means they are on a fixed income and they receive Medicare. Medicaid would only have to pay out what Medicare did not cover which is only about 20 percent or less.

My solution would be that Medicaid waive the income requirements if someone is already on SSDI.

Christmas Memories



Nessie Siler

I have found out it is true what they say. The older I get, the less my Christmas wishes come from a store. Nonetheless, they are hard to find.

I want everyone to be safe, and happy, warm and well, and well- fed. I want this for you no matter who you are, where you are from, however old or young, with disabilities or without.

My mother spent more time than she should have had to in the kitchen, especially over the holidays. But, I think in some way she loved the time we would spend together making batches of whatever warm and wonderful concoctions she had in mind for the year. My father, not to be outdone, insisted upon being in charge of the prime rib roast we had every year. He would watch over that roast in the oven, as carefully as if he were preparing for a royal coronation. According to my brother, who lives near him, he still does to this day.

Of course, all of this led to a family dynamic in which food = love. Trust me; it was in a good way!

May you all be happy, warm, well, and well-fed this holiday.

Holiday Deliciousness

HERSHEY'S Perfectly Chocolate Hot Cocoa



[Recipe Here](#)

Hot Cocoa for One

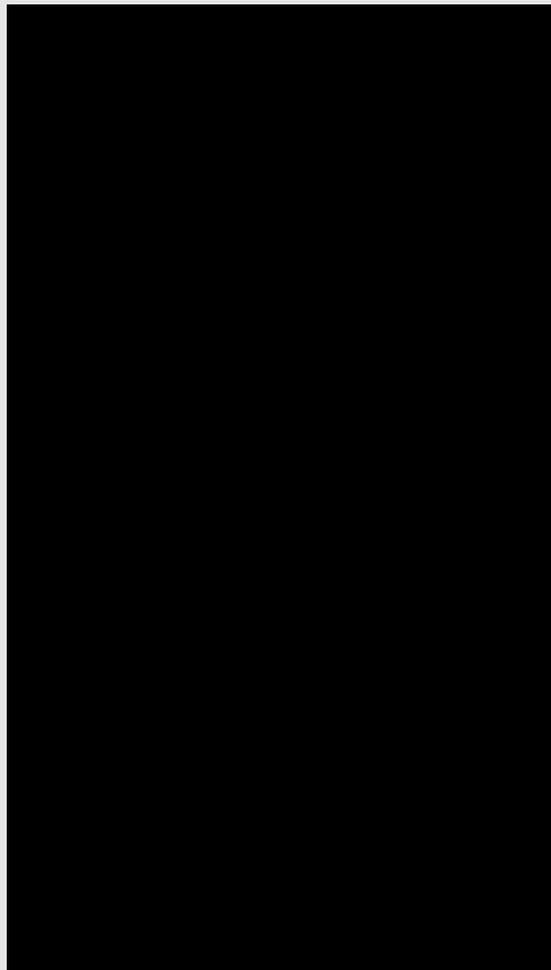


[Recipe Here](#)



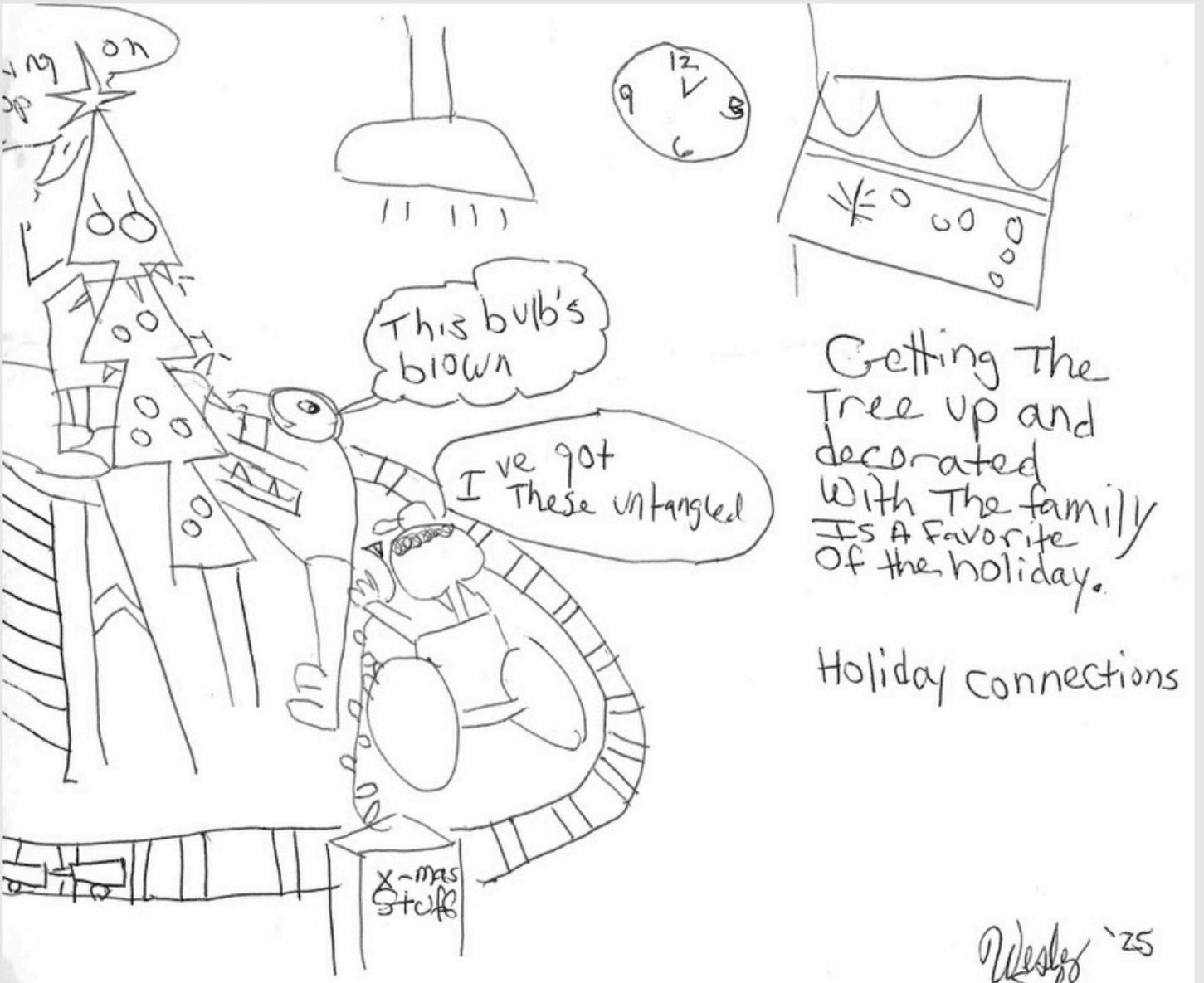
Findings

Aldea LaParr



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Wesley's Take





Encouraging messages of love and support to share.
DO YOU HAVE A MESSAGE? Please share with us!



Stories

to look back on



Small Town Support
Issue: Fall 2024

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Deep Friendships are needed in the IDD Community
Issue: Summer 2023

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